

February 14, 2008 Thornberry Introduces Bipartisan Civil Service Reform Bill

Washington, DC - Congressman Mac Thornberry (TX-13) today introduced H.R. 5439 to strengthen and reform the federal civil service system. "The country is fed up with inefficient, ineffective government," said Congressman Thornberry. "The legislation establishing the federal civil service is over 100 years old. We will never be able to meet the needs of the 21st century and give Americans the service they deserve with a personnel system stuck in the 19th century."

"Now is the time to act," observed Congressman Thornberry. "Half of all federal civil service employees are eligible for retirement within the next five years. That gives us an enormous challenge, but also a significant opportunity. Now is the time to reform the way we hire, fire, and manage federal employees for the good of the country. My bill will make it more likely that the 21st century federal government will attract America's best and brightest into careers of public service."

Thornberry's bill is unique in that it creates a commission of experts to assist Congress in crafting a new civil service system and then propose that new system in a bill that Congress must vote up or down, in much the same way that the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) has managed the military base reform and closure process.

Thornberry's bill includes provisions to allow the federal government to:

- Maintain high standards for employee merit and fitness
- Develop a fair management system linking pay to performance
- Have the ability to attract and rapidly hire highly qualified experts
- Develop a competitive system of recruitment that emphasizes filling skill gaps
- Focus on retention of high-quality personnel
- Conduct continuing education to maintain the quality of the workforce
- Have the flexibility to terminate inefficient or underperforming workers

"We have a lot of good people in the federal government who work hard and are very

frustrated. We have some others who are just biding their time," concluded Congressman Thornberry. "With a payroll of some \$107 billion and a civilian workforce of over 2.7 million employees it is essential for the stability and prosperity of our country that the federal government attracts and keeps top quality employees and then is able to manage them effectively."

(Footnoted copy of background attached in .PDF format)

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What Others Say About the Need for Civil Service Reform

"The organization of the federal government and the operation of public programs are not good enough: Not good enough for the American people, not good enough to meet the extraordinary challenges of the century just beginning, and not good enough for the hundreds of thousands of talented federal workers who hate the constraints that keep them from serving their country with the full measure of their talents and energy."

"We have grown too accustomed to government reorganization occurring piecemeal. The government of the 21st century demands fast action and implementation..."

Former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volker, Chairman of the National Commission on the Public Service, 2003

"This problem derives from multiple sources-ample private sector opportunities with good pay and fewer bureaucratic frustrations, rigid governmental personnel procedures, the absence of a single overarching threat like the Cold War to entice service, cynicism about the worthiness of government service, and perceptions of government as a plodding bureaucracy falling behind in a technological age of speed and accuracy."

Senators Gary Hart and Warren Rudman, Co-Chairmen, U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, 2001

"Unfortunately, the federal government is not configured to offer the work young Americans want.... Agencies are struggling just to hold the talent they already have, let alone imagining a new public service in which expertise moves freely among the government, private and

nonprofit sectors."

"The federal government is losing the talent war on two fronts. Its personnel system is slow in hiring, almost useless in firing, overly permissive in promoting, out of touch with performance and penurious in training. And it lacks any system at all for managing the government's vast, hidden workforce of contractors and consultants who work side-by-side with civil servants."

Paul C. Light, Nonresident Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution, The New Public Service

Civil Service Facts and Background

Brief History

The U.S. Code defines the Federal Civil Service as "all appointive positions in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the Government of the United States, except positions in the uniformed services." Today's civil service system was created in 1883 by the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act. Prior to this Act, government jobs were given on the basis of a spoils system. Presidents and political parties hired government employees based on patronage, and an employee could be fired at any time. The 1883 Act ended this patronage system and began to award government jobs based on merit and qualifications. Now only certain senior civil service positions, such as high-level diplomats and heads of executive agencies, are filled by political appointees.

In the Classification Acts of 1923 and 1949 developed the General Schedule (GS) pay scale for white collar personnel. In 1978 the Civil Service Reform Act brought modest reforms to the system, such as replacing the Commission on Civil Service Reform with the Office of Personnel Management and creating the Senior Executive Service and the Merit Systems Protection Board Report.

However, almost 30 years later, much work remains to be done in updating the cumbersome, burdensome personnel system created in the 19th century. We must act to address the fundamental problems of our civil service system so that it operates with the flexibility and speed needed to meet employment needs within the government and effectively serve the American people.

General Statistics

Total federal civilian
employees: 2,713,200

1.3% of the nation's workforce

Average age: 46.8 years

Average length of
service: 16.6 years

Bachelor's degree or higher:
42%

Average salary: \$61,714

DC metro:
\$\$79,695

Average GS grade: 9.8

DC metro: 11.7

Executive
Branch employs 96% of all federal civilian employees

GS 1-4:
86,092 employees - below \$29,769

GS 5-8: 389,544
employees

GS 9-12: 575,678 employees

GS 13-15:
364,785 employees - \$66,951 and up

Annual payroll: \$107
billion

Monthly payroll: \$9 billion

Half of the federal work force
will be eligible for retirement in the next 5 years

Failures of the
Present System

Slow HR Processes

- President
in 2002 said it can take 5 months to hire a new employee and 18 months to
terminate an poor performer
- Some agencies estimate it can take up
to a year from application to hire
- OPM does not even track how
long it takes to terminate a poor performer
- 3 months to fill a
vacancy
- 6 months to promote from within based on
performance
- 1 year for Top Secret clearance
- 5
months for Secret/Confidential clearance

Poor Job of
Recruitment

- Only 1/4 of 18-30 year olds say they would prefer to
work in the public sector
- 54% of people would not recommend young
people start their careers in government

Difficulty with Retention

- Low turnover among middle- and upper-management
- But front-line worker quit rate is 10%

Increased Dependence on Contractors

- 2005: over half of total government employees were contractors - 7.6 mil jobs
- Past 6 years: over 2.5 million new federal government contractors
- 1995-2005: the number of individual contract actions increased 600%
- More than half of all contract actions are no-bid